

CATHERINE'S LITERARY WORK

written with my own hand on the Isola della Rocca, with many sighs and abundance of tears, so that the eye, though seeing, saw not; but I was full of wonder at myself and at the goodness of God, considering His mercy towards the creatures that possess reason, and His providence, which so abounded towards me that, for my refreshment, since I was deprived of this consolation which through my ignorance I did not possess, He had given me and prepared me to receive the faculty of writing; in order that, descending from the height, I might have somewhat wherewith to relieve my heart, that it might not burst, since He does not wish to draw me yet from this darksome life. In a wondrous way, He set it for me in my mind, even as the master does to the child when he gives him the copy. Thus, as soon as you had left me, with the glorious evangelist John and Thomas of Aquino, I began to learn in my sleep. Forgive me for writing too much, for my hands and my tongue are in tune with my heart." ¹

This, however, was not the first letter that Catherine thus wrote. We learn from Fra Tommaso Caffarini that, when she 'rose from prayer with the desire of writing," she wrote a letter to Stefano Maconi with her own hand, at the end of which she said : "Know, my dearest son, that this is the first letter that I have ever written." He adds, on Stefano's authority, that she afterwards often wrote her own letters, as also certain pages of the *Dialogo*, and tells us elsewhere that the two wonderful epistles of Fra Raimondo at the end of her life, in which she takes leave of him and of the world, were also written by her own hand.² But, as already stated, at the present day, with six exceptions, we possess only copies ; and even these six originals were evidently

¹ Letter 272 (90). Cf. Letter 119 (178), to Alessa. It is uncertain whether the other letter to which Catherine refers is that numbered 267 (91), as seems most probable, if it is one of those preserved to us; Augusta Drane, by some inexplicable error, identifies it with Letter 226 (89), which was obviously written of Raimondo at Avignon in the previous year.

² *Supplementum*, Pars I. tract, i. ad finem (ff. 9-10 in the Casanatense MS.), 'ars III. tract, i. (f. 122); *Processus*, col. 1279. Unless this passage is one of the lost transcripts to the letters we possess, the letter to Stefano Maconi has not been preserved,